

# MEMORANDUM

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State of Alaska

TO: Alvin G. Ott  
Regional Supervisor  
Habitat Division

DATE: October 21, 1986

FILE NO:

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FROM: Robert F. McLean  
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Habitat Biologists  
Habitat Division

SUBJECT: Nome Field Trip -  
August 4-8, 1986

General observations and activities associated with McLean and Schideler's Seward Peninsula field inspection, August 4-8, 1986, are presented below. A separate report is in preparation for Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities' (ADOT/PF) highway projects.

General Stream Crossings: Ten stream ford crossings were field inspected and photographed to evaluate their continued suitability for general permit status. The Niukluk River, Sweetcake Creek, Ophir Creek #1 and #2, and Kougarok River #1-3 ford crossings were not inspected due to inaccessibility stemming from high water conditions. The Snake River crossing also was not inspected due to time limitations. Charlie Lean, Commercial Fisheries - Nome, reports that the Kougarok River crossings are at the extreme upper limit of anadromous fish distribution and may only be utilized for salmon spawning during years with extreme high fish returns.

Pilgrim River (Iron Creek): Ground reconnaissance. 4x4/heavy equipment access route to Iron Creek mining area. Historical route; significant current use. The crossing is located in an area of discontinuous sockeye salmon spawning and Arctic grayling overwintering habitat. The actual crossing, however, has purportedly received nearly continuous use for the past eight decades and is therefore presumed to have little current value as spawning habitat. The overland access route connects with the Nome-Taylor highway at Milepost 47.5. RECOMMEND continued general permit status. Photos available.

Snake River: No observations conducted this field trip. Crossing located at upper limit of anadromous designation. RECOMMEND continued annual reauthorization as a generally permitted crossing pending future on-site investigation.

Nome River #1 (Sampson Creek): Accesses mountain

ridges on divide between Nome and Snake river valleys (connects with Glacier Creek Road). Extensively utilized by hunters. Crossing is located in the upper reach of pink salmon and chum salmon spawning areas in most years. East stream bank gradual; west stream bank approximately 1 foot above water line - some bank degradation apparent. Stream substrate cobble with limited fines; area previously dredged earlier this century. RECOMMEND continued general permit status. Photos available.

**Nome River #2 (Divide Creek):** Purported historic crossing; actual utilization uncertain. Crossing ill-defined; single set of vehicle tracks on opposite bank. Stream substrate cobble; limited fines; area previously dredged. Horse drawn grader adjacent to crossing in overflow channel. Charlie Lean (CF-Nome) will attempt to verify current usage.

**Nome River #3 (Dorothy Creek):** Defined crossing; stream substrate cobble with limited fines; water depth approximately 6 inches to 1 foot at time of inspection. Accesses mountain ridges on divide between Nome and Snake river valleys (connects with Glacier Creek Road). Extensively utilized by hunters. RECOMMEND continued general permit status. Photos available.

**Nome River #4 (Clara Creek):** Accesses historic gold mining operation on Clara Creek. Crossing approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile from Nome-Taylor Highway. Uncertain of current status of mine (no APMA received in 1986). Actual crossing not inspected. Demonstrated public need questionable; Charlie Lean (CF-Nome) will attempt to quantify existing useage. Photo available.

**Nome River #5 (Buster Creek):** Well defined crossing approximately 1-2 feet deep (much shallower at normal water flows); limited potential for spawning use due to high probability of winter freeze-down. Road access available on both banks; no bank degradation apparent from past usage. Stream bottom firm with mixed cobble substrate; fines largely absent in substrate; limited risk of downstream sedimentation from continued use as a ford crossing. RECOMMEND continued general permit status. Photos available.

**Cripple Creek:** Aerial reconnaissance. Well defined crossing located just above beach high water line; approximately 3 feet deep at time of inspection. Access from Nome along beach. No bank degradation apparent from past usage. Stream substrate cobble; few fines apparent. RECOMMEND continued general permit status. Photos available.

**Penny River:** Aerial reconnaissance. Well defined crossing located just above terminal beach lagoon at first gravel bar. Access from Nome along beach. Water depth  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 feet deep at time of inspection. No bank degradation apparent from past usage. Stream substrate cobble; few fines apparent. RECOMMEND continued general permit status. Photos available.

**Solomon River (Lees Camp):** Historic crossing; well defined. Water depth  $3\frac{1}{2}$  to 4 feet deep at time of inspection. No significant bank degradation apparent from past usage. Stream substrate cobble; few fines apparent. Observed large wheeled loader make an actual crossing - no noticeable substrate compression observed; very minor and short-lived induced sedimentation from vehicle passage. RECOMMEND continued general permit status. Photos available.

**Big Hurrah Creek:** Historic crossing at confluence of Big Hurrah and the Solomon River. Broad, braided, shallow floodplain; water depth 6 inches to 1 foot at time of inspection. Stream substrate cobble; limited fines; previously dredge. Drove state vehicle across first channel; no induced sedimentation observed. RECOMMEND continued general permit status. Photos available.

Proposed General Stream Crossings: Five new proposed AS 16 permit crossings were inspected.

**Snake River** (proposed access route of length of river): Aerial reconnaissance. Historic route up the entire length of the Snake River. Existing trail is discontinuous and has not received any apparent recent use. ~~RECOMMEND that route not be generally permitted.~~

**Glacier Creek #1** (proposed): Aerial reconnaissance. Access route from highway to Snake River. Cabin constructed on opposite bank of Snake River circa 1981-82. Historic route, clearly defined road

located out of the bed of the creek (ordinary high water) for most of route. Several point to point crossings discernable at shallow, compacted riffle areas. RECOMMEND general permit status. Photos available.

Glacier Creek #2 (proposed): Aerial and ground reconnaissance. Historic road to mining camps in upper watershed. Occasionally used by recreational hunters. Stream substrate cobble with limited fines. Previously dredged. Established off-channel road visible from air in upper 2/3 of stream. Channel side-cutting has blocked existing road at several locations. Road relocation or instream travel required. RECOMMEND general permit status if public usage warrants. Additional documentation on utilization rates to be collected by ADF&G Game Division and Commercial Fisheries Division. Photos available.

Big Hurrah Creek (proposed access route up length of streambed): Ground reconnaissance of lower end. Historic access to mining areas in upper watershed. Infrequently utilized at present by recreational hunters. (For physical description see previous entry for Big Hurrah Creek crossing). RECOMMEND general permit status only if public usage warrants. At this time such levels of usage do not appear to exist.

Shovel Creek (proposed access route up streambed from an ingress point adjacent to Wayne Tachick's placer operation): Historic access route to upstream mining operations. Currently extensively utilized by recreational hunters. According to Charlie Lean, CF - Nome, the access route follows the east/northeast bank of Shovel Creek (above ordinary high water); crossing the bed of the stream once, possibly twice, several miles upstream from Wayne Tachick's operation. Shovel Creek has been documented only as an Arctic char rearing system; no spawning has been noted to date. RECOMMEND general permit status.

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Inspiration Offshore Mining: Everett Braun has recently been transferred by IMI from their New York City corporate office to Nome and has assumed his duties as IMI's Project Coordinator. Laura Cosell (Nome resident) has been hired as IMI's Public Relations director. Jim Gillis was recently hired as IMI's Environmental Engineer in charge of the water quality monitoring programs. The Bima arrived (late July)

intact and without damage after its barge trans-oceanic shipment from the South China Seas. Renovation and retooling is currently in progress. An unconfirmed rumour is that the Bima has significant structural and mechanical problems which may limit its utility in Alaskan waters. Specifically, unconfirmed reports indicated that the Bima's plumbing system does not have any drain valves which could be utilized in freezing weather to purge the water system. Secondly, the Bima purportedly does not have any provisions for space heating. Finally, it is reported that all of the electrical motors on board vessel are rusted out and will require replacement.

Gold Prospectors Association of America (George Massie): An aerial overflight was made on August 8th of George Massie's operation at the mouth of the Cripple Creek. Carl Grovoqual, Game Division - Nome, piloted the department's Piper P-3 Cub. Beach prospectors with hand-fed rocker boxes were noted at the mouth of the Penny River. Massie's operation consisted of a large, recently built camp located on the east bank of the Cripple Creek. Thirteen centralized buildings, three storage/workshop buildings, one small crawler loader, and one small tractor with front bucket were noted onsite. A second small tractor with front bucket and attached trailer was located on the west bank of the Penny River and, based on its setup, appeared to be utilized for transport of GPAA's clients.

The aerial overflight continued up the length of the Cripple Creek. Just upstream of the confluence of Fox Creek with the Cripple Creek, on the southeast bank of the Cripple Creek, a small cabin and two beached inflatable rafts were noted. Two unidentified individuals in yellow chest waders were observed operating small suction dredges within the Cripple Creek along a cut bank. No known AS 16 permits had been issued for the observed activities. Upon returning to Nome, Roger Aulabaugh, AST/FWP, was notified of the apparent AS 16 violation. Assistance in obtaining field verification was requested.

The purported overland access road along the east bank of the Cripple Creek consisted of little more than a series of ruts which appear to have stemmed from thermal degradation resulting from prior use. According to Charlie Lean, ~~Commercial Fish - Nome, the route was utilized once 2 to 3~~ years ago by a front end loader. The "overland" route crosses within and on the bed of the Cripple Creek at approximately six locations.

Richard Lee - Jerome Creek Placer Mining: Mr. Lee's claims were inspected on August 5th and 7th. The permitted movement

of Mr. Lee's skid-mounted washplant across the Solomon River occurred on August 1st. No significant damage to the bed or banks of the Solomon River were evident. However, extensive and significant instream alterations of the bed and banks of Jerome Creek were noted. Approximately 1/2 mile of Jerome Creek is affected. It appeared that a cat had bladed both sides of the creek and then made a pass back down through the middle. Two complete blocks to fish passage were noted: one consisting of an earthen and vegetative berm; the other an earthen berm which forced the stream overland through the vegetative cover. Two large overburden/tailing piles, two dozers (one D-4 or D-6, the other similiarly sized but an older vintage), and a skid-mounted wash plant were also noted. No operators were on site. Subsequent conversations with Mr. Tachick indicated that Mr. Lee had returned to Tin City; leaving two employees behind (we later learned that both employees were staying across the Solomon River at Lees Camp with Mr. Tachick). No NPDES or AS 16 permits had been issued for the noted activities. On August 7th, one unidentified salmonid, approximately four inches long, was observed in a side pool of Jerome Creek immediately below the disturbed section.

Wayne Tachick - Shovel Creek Placer Mining: Operation inspected on August 7th. Shut down for equipment repairs and pond cleanout at the time of inspection. Tachick's operation is a total recycle system located entirely off-river. No disturbance or apparent discharge to Shovel Creek noted. At time of inspection, Shovel Creek's water quality was excellent with an apparent visual turbidity level of less than 1 NTU. Mr. Tachick was purging his filled settling ponds with a garbage pump; discharge directed overland to a diked lowland area of willows 200 to 400 yards offset from Shovel Creek.

Noel Tanner - Anvil Creek Placer Mining: This operation was inspected on August 8th and found to be in non-compliance with the approved mining plan and AS 16 authorization. Actual operation is adjacent to the east bank of Anvil Creek and is located approximately 1/2 to 1 mile west of the approved location. No operators were present; although some equipment was on-site (trailer-mounted 13.5 inch Berkeley Pump Model B-4 with 8 inch intake hose). Three settling ponds had been constructed:

1st - approximately 130' by 50' by 4' (upper end full of pea-size gravel, lower end full of silt and emerging aquatic plants).

2nd- approximately 130' by 45' by 8'.

3rd - approximately 140' by 40' by 10'

First order successional vegetation was emergent from the banks of all three settling ponds - indicating fairly recent origin. The outfall from the 3rd settling pond was directed first through a 3' by 40' long culvert and then through a shallow ditch (200' long) to Anvik Creek.

Cooper Gulch Placer Mining: An off-site inspection from the Nome-Glacier Creek Road vantage was conducted August 6th and 8th. This large, open-pit mining operation is located immediately behind the high school-ADOT/PF complex and just east of Midnight Spring. Charlie Lean, Commercial Fish - Nome, and Carl Gravogaul, Game Division - Nome, indicated that they thought the operation was controlled by Noel Tanner. Approximately 300 plus acres have been disturbed. Local concern over this operation is high; predominately due to concerns that the city's water supply (Midnight Spring) may be interrupted or contaminated.

Specimen Gulch: An unknown placer mining operation was uncovered on August 6th; located just upstream (100 to 200 yards) of the Specimen Gulch Creek crossing of the Nome-Glacier Creek road. A subsequent (August 7) check with the Bub Loiselle of the Environmental Protection Agency and the ADNRR-DOM APMA office indicated that no state or federal permits had been secured for the operation. Carl Gravogaul indicated on August 8th that Noel Tanner had told him one week prior that both his Anvik Creek and Specimen Gulch Creek camps were in operation.

Specimen Gulch Creek discharges into the Anvik Creek approximately 1/4 mile downstream of the road crossing. This portion of Anvik Creek is not currently designated in the anadromous stream catalog.

A cat loader, large dozer, and vibrating wash plant were observed in operation on August 6th. On August 8th, the cat was observed stripping and stockpiling material, no sluicing was evident. One settling pond and no stream by-pass were noted. Water samples were collected at the downstream end of the Specimen Gulch Creek road culvert (approximately 100 to 200 yards downstream of pond outlet) on August 6th (1632 hours) and August 8th (1603 hours). Both sets of samples were transported to Fairbanks for in-house analysis. Results follow:

	<u>August 6</u>	<u>August 8</u>
Settleable		
Solids	5.0 ml/l	0.4 ml/l
Turbidity	7,424 NTU	2,032 NTU

A parallel water sample was collected on August 8th (1540 hours) at the upstream end of the Anvil Creek culvert crossing of the Nome-Teller road (located several miles downstream of the Specimen Gulch Creek operation). Settleable solids were non-detectable; turbidity - 2.5 NTU.

Nome Causeway: Construction nearing completion. Final keyed riprap to be placed at the nose of the causeway by mid-August. The permitted fifty foot breach was in place, but temporarily plugged, in apparent compliance with specifications. According to an unidentified Peter Kiewitt employee which we spoke to on August 7th, the plug was to be pulled by the second week of August.

Outside Agency Contacts:

Ron Davena, ADOT/PF, Project Coordinator, Nome  
Jim Cronk, ADOT/PF, Nome Council MP 42-53 Project  
Manager, Nome  
Roger Aulabaugh, AST/FWP, Nome  
John Vasik, District Attorney, Nome  
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Joyce Beelman, ADEC, Fairbanks (on field trip in Nome)  
Everett Braun, Inspiration Mines Incorporated, Nome

cc: Al Townsend, HD, Fairbanks

RFM/RTS:rfm